

Matter of Fact . . . By Joseph Alsop

From 'Za Rubezhom'

A BITTER Soviet attack on the Egyptian officer class has now appeared in the official Moscow weekly, *Za Rubezhom*. It probably means that the price Gamal Abdel Nasser will have to pay for continued Soviet support is a near takeover of the Egyptian armed forces by the Soviets.



Alsop

The reasons for the attack are easy enough to understand. After all, if you have invested something like \$2 billion, and all you have got for your pains is shame and humiliation and the unpleasant spectacle of expensive equipment either destroyed or captured, it is only human to get a bit cross.

Yet the *Za Rubezhom* article goes considerably further than the most disenchanted young American correspondent would ever go about an allied army, even speaking of treason in the Egyptian officer corps under the only slightly milder heading, "apostasy." Furthermore, the authors are Igor Belyaev, the chief *Pravda* correspondent for Asia and Africa, and *Pravda*'s man in Egypt, Evgenyi Primakov.

THE PEOPLE signing the article make it nearly as official as George F. Kennan's famous article on containment of the Soviet Union—which was demurely signed Mr. X, yet announced a policy that has been followed, rightly or wrongly, from that day onwards. The *Za Rubezhom* article's relevant passages begin with a biscuit thrown to Nasser, in the way one might throw a biscuit to a trained seal.

"The achievements of the Egyptian revolution," say Belyaev and Primakov, "are obvious." They list industrialization, "agrarian reform," government control "of basic means of production" and "dynamic development." (The "dynamic development" of Egypt by Nasser is what Sen. Arthur Vandenberg used to call a "vivid contemplation," when compared with the evilly undynamic development of Israel. And the two *Pravda* correspondents continue:

"But alongside this positive process, negative processes also took place in the heart of the Egyptian revolution. In peaceful times, cer-

tain of (these) processes were not duly noticed . . . now it is essential to draw the proper lesson from the Israeli aggression. What is the real reason for the military failure of the United Arab Republic in the face of enemy attack?

"We asked our Egyptian friends. Their answer could be summarized in one word—apostasy. And they spoke . . . of one (or another) general or senior officer. One cannot imagine that the majority of generals and officers sold themselves to the enemy. Nothing of the kind took place. None the less the (Egyptian) army gave up position after position in the Sinai Peninsula. And the suddenness of the attack explains much but not all . . .

"THE AIR FORCE is the most privileged branch of the UAR forces. By tradition . . . only the sons of the wealthiest families can join . . . similar situations also prevailed in other branches of the armed forces . . . the expression, 'military bourgeoisie,' is widespread in (Egypt) . . .

"Not all can be blamed on the army alone, (however). In fact one can replace all the generals but not solve other important problems . . . many call for the rebuilding of the governmental apparatus . . . people are convinced that the victorious revolution of national liberation must be accomplished by breaking up the old governmental apparatus . . . the front on which major engagements of the future will take place is internal politics."

If the most self-righteous and anti-administration newspaper in the U.S. published a comparable article about an allied government, every one from bootblack to prime minister in the allied capital would now be on a high, rolling boil because of "U.S. interference." In this case, one must add, certain allowances must be made for the fact *Za Rubezhom* appears to speak for the semi-Stalinist Soviet Communists.

Yet the message (most probably from the Soviet army) is none the less quite clear; and it is further confirmed by what is actually happening in Egypt. Heretofore, Egyptian officers went to the Soviet Union for training. Now a vast Soviet MAG is being set up in Egypt itself—which one can perhaps interpret as a major silent compliment to American methods.

THIS SOVIET military aid group must have had to be accepted by Nasser, as the price for the large recent arms deliveries. Already, Soviet advisory officers have penetrated the entire remains of the Egyptian army, even down to battalion level. And the noble Nasser has arrested and interned over 600 former Egyptian officers, hoping to save his own skin by cannibalizing his counterparts.

Meanwhile, no one can say exactly what is meant by the "major" internal political

the ruins is temporarily dominated by pragmatists like Zakariah Mohieddine; while the Soviet stooge, Ali Sabry, has been demoted. Are the pragmatists to be destroyed? Is Ali Sabry to be raised again? Is Nasser himself to retain any freedom of action?

The answer is, of course, that Nasser will have immeasurably less freedom than Fidel Castro (unless the Chinese give him nuclear weapons) if the *Za Rubezhom* program is fully carried out. He may endure as a figurehead, but not as a real leader, if he mortgages his whole future to the Kremlin. But the question, alas, is probably not whether Nasser is willing to offer the mortgage, but whether the Kremlin is willing to pay the really enormous resulting bill.

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